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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 411th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 30 September 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued);

Initial report of the Czech Republic (CRC/C/11/Add.11; CRC/C/Q/CZE/1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Somol, Mr. Holub, Mr. Sovák, Ms. Jeřábková, Mr. Biskup, Mr. Cink and Ms. Novotná (Czech Republic) took places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the delegation of the Czech Republic and invited it to introduce its initial report (CRC/C/11/Add.1).

3. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic), supplementing the information contained in the initial report and written replies on recent measures taken by the Government and other aspects of Czech legislation and policy relating to children's issues, said that the Czech Republic regarded young people as its most valuable asset and was determined to provide children with the best possible conditions for their development. In that connection, it ensured access to education, health and social security for every child from birth, as well as the necessary support and protection for children in difficult situations and the most vulnerable groups, namely, minorities and the disabled. At present, the Government's task was being hampered by the sweeping and fundamental changes taking place in all sectors of Czech society. The delegation hoped that the dialogue with the Committee would prove constructive and would welcome the views of the members on areas where improvements might be made and information on any relevant experience of other countries.

4. The Czech Constitution guaranteed the right to education and provided equal access for all children, including the handicapped and those belonging to national minorities. The right of children to be educated in the school of their choice was recognized. Furthermore, school played a significant role in encouraging the development of a healthy lifestyle and included programmes on sex education and drug abuse, as well as specific programmes aimed at problem groups with the participation of relevant specialists.

5. In the social sphere, the prime task was to ensure the institutional basis for the social and legal protection of children through, inter alia, the Law on the Social and Legal Protection of the Child, which defined children's social rights and would function as a lex specialis. The number of children's welfare workers had significantly increased since 1993 and additional training was provided to meet new requirements for highly qualified experts.

6. As examples of available health care services, he drew attention to the Perinatal Health Programme aimed at reducing neonatal and infant mortality and to preventive and dispensary medical care for all children - a long-standing priority of the Czech Republic. New problems dealt with by the health sector included child abuse and neglect, which required intersectoral cooperation.

7. The Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had recently been on mission to the Czech Republic, where she had visited the relevant

Government institutions. The recommendations contained in her report to the Commission on the criminal protection of juveniles against sexual abuse had been discussed by Czech experts. A new commission to amend the Penal Code had just been set up. The idea of drafting a special youth code was under serious consideration.

8. Substantive amendments to the Family Act would ensure greater protection of the interests of children in future in parent/child relations. The areas affected included parental responsibility, education, maintenance and contact with parents, the legal representation of children and the administration of their property, decision-making relating to alternative care and the rights of children in judicial and other proceedings. The position of children would be further strengthened by the ratification of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction; moreover the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption would be ratified shortly.

9. As far as criminal law was concerned, the Government had two priorities: first, investigators must be trained how to treat child victims and offenders and follow strict guidelines to that end; and, secondly, cooperation with specialized organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), had to be enhanced. A national committee for crime prevention had been set up to coordinate all activities in that area.

10. His country played an active role in international efforts to combat problems affecting children, such as sexual exploitation. It had submitted a report to the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children which suggested ways of dealing effectively with the problem and described the Czech situation in terms of relevant statistics, legislation, sanctions and support programmes. Czech experts had taken part in the East-West Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect held the previous year. His country would also host the Congress of European Social Paediatricians. The cooperation of individual ministries with the Czech UNICEF Committee was very important in that connection.

11. In conclusion, he said that the dialogue with the Committee represented another important stage of the implementation of the Convention in the Czech Republic and that the Committee's concluding observations would influence its future work in that field.

12. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to put questions relating to general measures of implementation (paras. 1-11 of the list of issues).

13. Mrs. PALME said that the most memorable event in her working life had been the World Summit for Children, of which the climax had undoubtedly been the statement by the President of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel. She welcomed efforts made by the Czech Republic to implement the Convention and improve the situation of children's rights, particularly by harmonizing its domestic legislation, allowing the participation of NGOs in recognition of their valuable contribution to society, training professionals working with children and establishing bodies dealing specifically with them. She was aware that the country was having difficulty in adjusting to the new economic

order and wondered how the Government intended to safeguard standards in the education, health and welfare sectors and ensure that the most vulnerable groups of children did not suffer. She expressed concern about the growing number of street children in the country. Who were they exactly and what steps were being taken to deal with the problem? She would also welcome more information on how the Convention was made available in minority languages.

14. Mr. KOLOSOV asked whether the rights embodied in the Convention were reflected in the National Programme of action for children. He also wondered how the principle of undertaking all appropriate measures for the implementation of the Convention to the maximum extent of available resources was applied, given that children were usually worse off during periods of economic transition. In that connection, how were the best interests of children reflected in current legislation? What training on the Convention was given to professionals working with children? Lastly, he would welcome more information on the procedures for drafting the report and to what extent NGOs had participated.

15. Mrs. KARP, referring to Mr. Kolosov's comments, said that another aspect of resource allocation was how resources were channelled into programmes, for instance, in order to avoid any duplication of efforts. Was there any mechanism to monitor programmes relating to children in the Czech Republic? Many different bodies dealing with children's issues were mentioned in the report, which gave the impression of a somewhat compartmentalized system; perhaps a more unified approach to children's issues in general would be preferable.

16. She welcomed efforts to bring domestic legislation into line with the Convention, including the amendments to the Family Act and the Law on the Social and Legal Protection of the Child. However, when would the latter be considered by Parliament and what were the main obstacles to its approval be likely to be? Might the contentious issues reflect a misunderstanding or non-acceptance of certain basic principles embodied in the Convention, such as the participation of children and greater protection of their rights?

17. There was always the risk that, once legislation was enacted, it might not be properly followed up by information campaigns and training programmes for the professionals concerned. What steps would the Czech Government take following the implementation of the legislation in question to make sure that the professionals concerned really had grasped the principles at stake?

18. Mrs. SARDENBERG requested clarification on the overall structure responsible for children's issues in the Czech Republic. In 1993, the Czech Government had ratified most of the basic human rights instruments, which represented a major commitment in terms of political and legislative reform. What problems did the Government face in that connection? Furthermore, in reply to the Committee's question on a coordination mechanism, the Czech Government had stated that no change was foreseen for the time being. How did it plan to implement the Convention with its current sectoral approach?

19. As for data collection, the information given in the written replies referred to several sources only. She would welcome more information on the existence of a mechanism for data collection in the country as a whole.

20. Mr. RABAH said that he shared the concerns expressed about the impact of the Czech Republic's current political and economic transition on health and education services for children. He also endorsed the importance of data collection and the translation of the Convention into minority languages. The Constitutional Court had decided that the Convention should be directly applicable and binding, yet, apparently, some courts were reluctant to ensure that it was. Was that indeed true and, if so, what was the reason for it? He would welcome more information on the status of NGOs and whether they were kept informed of government decisions relating to children's issues.

21. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic), replying to Mrs. Palme, expressed appreciation for her comments on the statement by the President of the Czech Republic at the World Summit for Children in 1990. Under the new regime, NGOs certainly made a valuable contribution to all sectors of Czech society. Details of specific programmes run by them would be provided in due course. The global transformation of existing structures was undoubtedly a key factor in the successful implementation of the Convention and ranged from the restructuring of the State administration to the availability of human resources for work in specialist fields relating to children. The problem of street children was being dealt with through general measures involving all relevant sectors and government institutions.

22. Mr. CINK (Czech Republic) said that the Polish minority in northern Moravia had been instructed to obtain a Polish version of the Convention from Poland. If translations into any other minority languages were considered necessary, the Council for Minorities would be invited to take the necessary steps.

23. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic), replying to Mr. Kolosov, said that ways of improving the coordination of various ministries' activities on behalf of children were being discussed, as was the setting up of a single institution to act as the main coordinator. The Czech Government considered that catering for the long-term needs of children was one of the best possible uses to which resources could be put during the transition phase.

24. Mr. HOLUB (Czech Republic) said that the best interests of the child had been defended by the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. All international human rights instruments to which the Czech Republic was a party were binding and took precedence over national legislation. Efforts were being made to harmonize all municipal laws with the Charter and the two important new acts dealing with family law and the social protection of minors which the Government was about to adopt would similarly be harmonized with the relevant United Nations and Council of Europe conventions and with the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. He was convinced that the acts would be adopted without delay, since all members of Parliament were in favour of measures to safeguard children. In the meantime, the best interests of the child were being protected by a number of appropriate legislative provisions. Ministries' efforts to coordinate new legislation were working well on the whole, but there might be some room for improvement.

25. Mr. CINK (Czech Republic) said that there was a distinction between in-service and initial teacher training. The Convention on the Rights of the

Child was one of the subjects studied by all trainee teachers, especially those intending to teach civics. The State had made arrangements to retrain teachers already in service at its network of education centres, where great emphasis was placed on topics such as human rights and the European Youth Campaign against Racism, Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and Intolerance. Children's rights also formed part of the special training received by headmasters, school inspectors and curriculum planners.

26. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said that, although few NGOs had participated in the drafting of the report, those which had done so had represented many others. The report would henceforth be used by all NGOs in the Czech Republic as background information and dialogue between NGOs and the Government was crucial when it came to implementing the Convention.

27. Replying to Mrs. Karp about the allocation of resources, he said that, in practice, it was up to the individual ministries to maximize the effectiveness of their limited resources and that comparisons with other countries' programmes were gradually helping to enhance the quality of his country's projects. His colleagues would provide some factual examples from their ministries' activities.

28. Ms. NOVOTNÁ (Czech Republic) said that her ministry had been cooperating with NGOs since 1990. Before that, the protection of the child had been the sole responsibility of the State. She considered that the former approach had been short-sighted and welcomed the new set-up, which was operating smoothly. NGOs could apply to a ministry for a grant for a particular project. Programmes could be implemented jointly by NGOs and State bodies. Her ministry was furthering the implementation of the Convention by holding seminars, workshops and conferences for child-care experts and members of the public. It likewise participated in the work of NGOs concerned with children because it considered cooperation with NGOs to be vital; NGOs had helped to draft the Law on the Social and Legal Protection of Children and their contribution had been most valuable, since it had been based on practical experience.

29. Mr. HOLUB (Czech Republic) said that the new Family Act would update legislation adopted in 1963 and he expected that the new Civil Code, some provisions of which related to the family, would be on the statute book by 2003. The Code would take into consideration all the economic and social changes which had occurred in the Czech Republic over the last 30 years. Everything possible was being done to educate judges and public prosecutors about basic human rights and fundamental freedoms because, under article 45 of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which the Czech Republic was a party, a court decision could be set aside if it did not comply with the Convention.

30. Mr. SOVÁK (Czech Republic) said that children's rights and the Convention itself were some of the main subjects studied by prospective judges and public prosecutors and that the provisions of article 1 of the Convention had been embodied in Czech law in article 216 (b) of the Penal Code.

31. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said that, while several ministries were responsible for implementing the Convention because each one dealt with the

individual aspects coming under its jurisdiction, the Foreign Ministry was in charge of overall coordination. The 1993 Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms formed the basis for the implementation of a large number of international obligations the Czech Republic had accepted when it had acceded to numerous conventions following the velvet revolution. Those commitments had substantially increased the workload of all the ministries concerned, as some instruments entailed considerable changes to the country's laws and legal system. All governmental and non-governmental sectors were nevertheless doing their best to cope and to comply with the commitments in question as speedily as possible.

32. Ms. JEŘÁBKOVÁ (Czech Republic), referring to pressure on civil servants owing to the fact that, as the legal successor to the former Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic was bound by the international treaties signed and ratified by that State, said that a great deal of legislative work had been generated when the country had joined the Council of Europe, which was strictly monitoring compliance with 38 of its conventions. It would soon be decided which ministry should have overall responsibility for the protection of children and the Foreign Ministry might well hand over jurisdiction for that matter to the Ministry of Education the following month.

33. On the question of the procedure followed in preparing reports, she said that the draft text was circulated to the various ministries for their comments. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to finalize the draft, which would then be referred back to the ministries concerned for further comment, a process which could take months or even years. In addition, the Government worked in close cooperation with a number of parliamentary committees, notably the Petition Committee for human rights and nationalities. As to the role of non-governmental organizations, the Government had frequent consultations with the Czech Helsinki Committee on matters relating to Czech citizenship law. A number of informal meetings with other Czech non-governmental organizations had been organized during the preparation of the report and the foundations for more systematic cooperation had been laid, although she was aware that there was still room for improvement.

34. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said that the aim was not to set up a single ministry with overall responsibility for children's affairs, but rather to improve coordination between the various existing ministries.

35. Ms. JEŘÁBKOVÁ (Czech Republic), replying to Mrs. Sardenberg's question on data collection, said that, as already stated, the various issues affecting children were dealt with by the particular ministries concerned. Since 1996, the Ministry of the Interior, together with the police, had been compiling a special computer programme on a nationwide scale which contained records of crimes against young people, as well as data on juvenile offenders, drug addiction and extremism. That programme was now being tested and was expected to yield valuable new information. In addition, every ministry concerned with children's issues was collecting its own data. The Government was fully aware of the need for a unified system of data collection and it expected that, once the body with overall responsibility for the task had been set up, the problem would be solved.

36. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic), replying to Mr. Rabah's question on how the economic transformation that had taken place in the country had affected the system of health care for children, said the restructuring process had affected all sectors and the health sector was no exception. His Government was still considering the question of how health care for children could best be provided.

37. Mr. BISKUP (Czech Republic) said the Ministry of Health considered it very important that paediatric care should be comprehensive and include preventive, diagnostic and dispensary elements. Following the change of regime, there was now a new approach to the concept of public health and there had been considerable changes, not only from the legal, but also from the financial point of view, in the system of health care for children. That system was now financed from two sources, insurance contributions and the State budget. The first covered primary health care, paediatrics and hospitals, while the second covered day centres, kindergartens and children's homes. In addition, there were four medical associations providing specialist services in four separate areas, neo-natal care, paediatrics, social welfare and the care of adolescents. In 1992, a separate department of the Ministry of Health dealing with the care of the handicapped had been set up and it allocated grants to non-governmental organizations working in the field.

38. Mr. SOVÁK (Czech Republic), replying to Mr. Rabah's question on how the Convention was incorporated into the Czech legal system, said that a number of legal provisions had been directly inspired by the Convention. One example was chapter 6 of the Czech Penal Code, dealing with crimes against young people and the family. A new Code for Juveniles, currently the subject of wide-ranging debate, was now being prepared by a codification committee, which was expected to complete its work in one or two years time.

39. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) pointed out that article 10 of the Constitution expressly provided that ratified and promulgated international accords on human rights and fundamental freedoms to which the Czech Republic had committed itself were immediately binding and were superior to the law.

40. In reply to a further point raised by Mr. Rabah, he said he could state with certainty that no ministry or other sector of the Czech administration lacked the will to implement the rights and obligations arising out of the Convention. Any shortcomings in that respect were due chiefly to a lack of material and human resources.

41. It was not the practice in the Czech Republic to collect statistical data specifically concerning minorities, since to do so would be regarded as discriminatory.

42. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation for the replies it had given, but said that a few points still remained unanswered. In referring to the debate currently taking place on the proposed draft legislation, Mrs. Karp had asked what areas of the Convention had given rise to difficulties and whether any had failed to gain acceptance. The reply given to Mr. Rabah's question on how the transition to a new economic regime had affected the social services had dealt only with the health sector, although she assumed that other sectors, such as that of education, would also be affected.

43. The Committee would appreciate more information about the status and powers of the Commission for the Family referred to in paragraph 12 of the report and, in particular, on any work it had done to protect the rights of the child outside the context of legislation. Did the Commission have its own budget and did its members have expertise in specific fields relating to children? The Committee would also like to have specific examples of how the Convention was being applied in the courts.

44. Mr. KOLOSOV joined in thanking the delegation for its replies, but said he had expected that a little more detail and more concrete examples would be given, since the Czech Republic already had a well developed system of data collection.

45. Referring to his earlier question on whether the Convention was reflected in a national plan of action, he recalled that the World Summit for Children had recommended the adoption of national plans of action covering the next decade. Had the Czech Republic adopted such a plan and, if so, what were its goals in relation to health and education, what progress had been made in achieving those goals and which provisions of the Convention were reflected in the plan?

46. He had also asked about the teaching of the principles and provisions of the Convention both to children and to professionals. Article 42 of the Convention required that they be made widely known "by appropriate and active means". Although private educational institutions were now authorized in the country, those institutions should be required to meet certain minimum standards. In particular, it was the duty of the State to see to it that knowledge of the Convention was included in the curriculum and he would like to know whether or not that had been done.

47. On the question of participation of non-governmental organizations, he would not conceal the fact that certain national non-governmental organizations had not been satisfied with the consultation process. Although the delegate had stated that informal meetings had been held and that it was the intention to improve cooperation in the future, he understood that certain proposals made by non-governmental organizations for amending the initial draft had been ignored.

48. Referring to article 4 of the Convention, which required States parties to undertake the necessary measures "to the maximum extent of their available resources", he pointed out that the Czech Republic was by no means the poorest of the countries of Central Europe in terms of resources for health. Article 24 of the Convention recognized the right of the child to "enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness". However, he noted that paragraph 156 of the report stated that over 172,000 children and adolescents were registered as chronically ill. That figure was very high and the report should give information on the budgetary allocations made for the treatment of such children so that the Committee could judge whether or not they were sufficient.

49. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that one of the principal messages of the Convention was that the child should be seen as a whole person. In asking her

earlier question about coordination, she had wanted to know how the various ministries and departments came together to decide on a single global policy for children. A national plan of action would enable the Government to formulate such a policy, but it had first to define its position on the matter. The same question applied to data collection: how was the data collected in the various sectors used in a global way to decide what action should be taken?

50. Since the ratification of the Convention in 1993, what changes had there been in the situation of children in the Czech Republic? Was the public at large aware of the Convention and its message? What was the role of Parliament and what mechanisms were there to permit consultation with different groups when framing legislation? More detailed information on those points would help the Committee to see to what extent the Government perceived the Convention as a political tool for improving the situation of children in the country.

51. The delegation had explained how horizontal coordination at the national level between the various ministries was assured, but she would also like to know how such coordination was extended to the local and village levels. Were national non-governmental organizations fully independent or did they receive financing from the Government? She pointed out that the Convention was the only instrument containing a specific provision requiring States parties to disseminate its principles. In view of that provision, how did the Government plan to change public attitudes towards the rights of children?

52. Mrs. KARP asked whether the new legislation currently in preparation contained an express mention of the Convention as the source of some of the rights provided for. Did the rights of the child, as distinct from human rights generally, form part of the curriculum of schools and had it been made a compulsory subject? Were the police included in the programme of education about the Convention and how were they planning to introduce a new code of ethics relating to the rights of the child into their daily work? The training of professionals in the medical, social welfare and legal fields should also include such a code, which would give guidance on how to interact with children, how to relate to their wishes and how to take their opinions into consideration. Many judges, for instance, preferred to hear the child's views not from the child itself, but through a third party, such as a social worker.

53. Noting that the information provided failed to mention any plans to establish an ombudsman for children's rights, she asked why that should be so. Protection by the State seemed to be provided only if the parents were unable or unwilling to accept the task. An ombudsman was an office independent of any part of the administration involved in implementing the law and could therefore be objective and impartial in considering a complaint from a child. Access to the courts to lodge a complaint was not easy for children, or even for their parents, because it was complicated and expensive. Children in institutions were even more handicapped in that regard. It would therefore be useful to have a body to which children themselves could apply for investigation of complaints on all aspects of children's rights.

54. She asked what arrangements existed for coordinating the national and local implementation of the Convention. In view of the fact that the practical work of dealing with children's issues was done at the local level, she asked whether local authorities were receiving any training to ensure such coordination and whether their work in the field of children's rights was being monitored.

55. It was very important to have sufficient data to allow the status of children's rights to be properly evaluated. The present system in the Czech Republic, whereby each ministry with an interest in children's rights collected its own data in its own sector, might not be the best approach, since a comprehensive overview of all aspects of children's rights was needed to draw up effective policies; that, not the collection of information for reporting to the Committee, was the principal reason for gathering data. She also had difficulty with the reasoning that data should not be gathered on minorities because it was a form of discrimination. Unless data was available on minorities, it was not possible to determine disparities or take action to eliminate them.

56. Mr. HOLUB (Czech Republic), referring to coordination, said that law-making was initiated either by the Government itself or, less frequently, by individual members of Parliament. In the former case, the preparation of bills took place in two stages: elucidating the principles on which the bill would be based and, following approval of those principles by the Government, the drafting of the bill itself. In preparing for the reform of the Family Act and in drafting the bill on the protection of minors, the Commission for the Family, which had been established by the Petition Committee for human rights, a permanent parliamentary body, consulted not only the principal ministries involved in applying family law, but also churches, trade unions and a large number of non-governmental organizations. Before making their proposals, the ministries had consulted their branches at the local level. In addition, three parliamentary seminars had been held on the subject in the past three years, with a broad spectrum of participants, including representatives of all government bodies and many non-governmental organizations.

57. There were a number of practical aspects to the reform of family law and the protection of minors. With regard to adoption, current Czech practice allowed the adoption of children without the consent of the natural parents where the latter had shown no interest in the children for the previous six months, as in the case of children placed in institutions by their mothers. Such a practice was in the vast majority of cases in the best interests of children and of their prospective adoptive parents, as it permitted the adoption process to proceed reasonably rapidly. However, since, under the European Convention on the Adoption of Children, that procedure violated the rights of the natural parents, an article had been introduced in the bill providing for special public hearings by a magistrate to determine the views, if any, of the natural parents on the matter. However, there was considerable public opposition to such an approach, since it would prevent anonymity from being ensured. Efforts were being made to solve the problem by maintaining the hearing, but restoring the anonymity of the procedure subsequently.

58. Trafficking in children was another problem that required attention. In the Czech Republic, the paternity of a child could be acknowledged by any man, provided that he had the consent of the mother; his name could then be entered in the relevant registry of births. That enabled the child to be included on the passport of the putative father and taken out of the country legally. Efforts were being made to solve that problem by enabling the public prosecutors' offices to oppose recognition of such paternity, but difficulties were being experienced in coordinating the various aspects of the problem.

59. In the Czech judicial system, judges and magistrates were from the outset of their careers confined to specialized fields, the main divisions being criminal, civil and commercial law. In the inquisitorial system of justice practised, magistrates dealing with children were entitled to initiate an investigation into any suspected breach of the law relating to children without requiring notification from any party, parent, child or other. Magistrates specializing in children's cases received special training in the field and were expected to have considerable experience in dealing with children.

60. Under the 1996 European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights, provision was made for children to bring proceedings against other persons, such as their parents, on their own account. However, there had been considerable public opposition in the Czech Republic to introducing such a provision in Czech law on the grounds that it would pave the way for blackmail by children.

61. The Commission for the Family, which consisted of seven members of the Czech House of Representatives and five experts from university faculties and the Ministry of Justice, was one of a number of standing parliamentary committees and, as such, had considerable powers in seeking information, for example, from various ministries.

62. Mr. SOVÁK (Czech Republic) said that the direct applicability of the Convention in national law under article 10 of the Constitution was very beneficial. The judiciary was independent, judges and magistrates being appointed by the President for an unlimited term of office. The problem in applying the law in the changed circumstances following the events of 1989 was that not only the law, but also the attitudes of the judiciary had had to change. That was a question of training; he had been gratified at a recent seminar in Washington to find that Czech methods of training judges were not very different to those current in the United States. It also had to be remembered that many members of the judiciary had left the system after 1989, and that had led to considerable difficulties in staffing courts.

63. Ms. NOVOTNÁ (Czech Republic) said that, as a social worker and a lawyer, she had had a hand in drafting the bill on the social and legal protection of children. She endorsed the view stated in the preamble to the Convention that children required special protection because they were not yet fully physically and mentally mature. The Convention had direct application for the everyday tasks of social workers in the Czech Republic, who received special training for their work and were expected regularly to attend courses run by the Ministry of the Interior on various aspects of their work, including the implementation of the Convention.

64. Other ministries also organized courses for social workers in areas under their jurisdiction; such courses targeted specific areas of the Convention. For example, courses were given by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on the treatment of sexually abused and neglected children. Other courses dealt with the psychological and social skills needed in work with children in difficult circumstances. In order to increase the grasp of certain areas, experts from various non-governmental organizations were also consulted, some of whom organized special training courses. The Convention was warmly welcomed in the Czech Republic and every effort was being made to prepare workers on the ground to implement its provisions.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.